

My Life as a Seahorse

A Children's Short Story
Written by Rae D. Finnie



Hi there! I'm here to tell you all about my life. Yep, that's right! I'm a seahorse and I love it! It's super fun to be a seahorse! I'm teeny tiny, I can swim around as much as I want, and I have the best hiding places you could ever think of for hide-and-go seek!

Oh, I love being a seahorse. The only bad part is my size. Because I'm so small and also because we have no arms, I'm kind of like being the worms of the sea ya know? Only, we're SO much cuter! Sometimes my friends make fun of me because of my size, but I don't care. Sometimes being small is kind of neat!

Well, I'm so tiny that I have to find some way of surviving down here in this ocean water. Do you know that us seahorses can be as small as I and I $\frac{1}{2}$ centimeters short? That's barely half an inch. That's probably smaller than your hand! And it's definitely smaller than your foot. It's probably the size of one of your fingers! Yeah, pretty tiny huh? Well, that's how small my cousin is and man, I worry about her. And I'm only half an inch taller than her.

But alas, I'm hoping to be tall like my dad! He's 10 inches tall, but that's not as tall as my grandpa. Now my grandpa, he's 14 inches tall and that's as tall as we come. And that's just a little taller than your ruler (if you can imagine that!).

One way that I stay out of trouble is because I have mobile eyes! Yep, I said mobile eyes... Can you believe it? I have eyes that move all over the place. My eyes can move far forward and far back so that I can watch out for predators and prey and other floating mean things that are trying to eat me! But not too many things try to eat me all that often. I'm a little bit bony so, most predators stay away from biting into me! No one wants a mouthful of bones for dinner. Lucky me, huh?

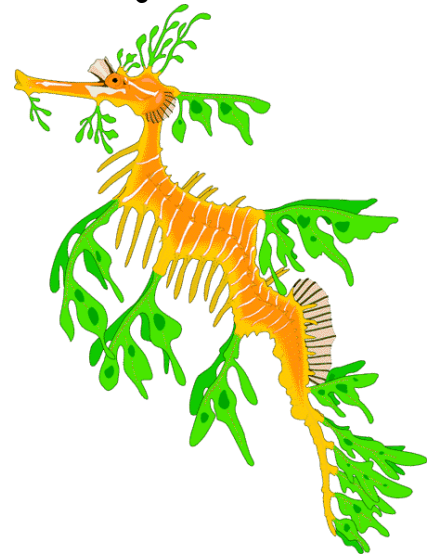


And guess what else keeps me away from predators? I bet you didn't know that I can even change colors sometimes just to blend in with my surroundings. We call it camouflage down here. Have you heard of it? It's kind of like what a chameleon does, only I can hide much better than a chameleon! Well, I have no choice but to blend in silly! Because if I didn't, do you know how many crabs would be able to find me? They would gobble me whole! I have to have some way of disguising myself down here in the ocean water! And yes, I said crabs. Those are the guys I have to watch out for. And this is partly where my size helps too! Because I am so small, I can't swim super fast like other marine animals. You know, like sharks! Wooah! Those guys are fast! Well, I am a slow swimmer and swimming slowly helps me blend in! It helps me hide in the water. If you move really slowly, it's harder for people to see you! So when I swim, I just blend in with the coral, the rocks and the ocean grass around me. That's why I said it was good for hide-and-seek.



Speaking of predators, I bet you're wondering what I like to eat for dinner. Well, considering I have such a tiny mouth, there's not much to choose from. I have a tiny mouth and no teeth! So that really limits my choices. But I do like to eat plankton, shrimp and other small crustaceans (KRU-STAY-SHUNS - that's a fancy word for animals that live under the sea like shrimp and lobster that have segmented bodies). So I eat my food as it swims past me. I suck it up through my long snout! It's so much fun! And I eat it whole - all in one bite! It's kind of like eating spaghetti and slurping one whole spaghetti noodle up with one breath! No, not because I'm greedy... again, it's because I have no teeth silly! It's kind of like being a snaggle-tooth all of the time for your whole entire life. And just like I don't have any teeth, I don't really have a stomach either... and again, it's because I'm so tiny! So I have to eat worms and shrimp all in one gulp so that I can store up food and have some energy to swim around!

And I bet you're also wondering why I have such a fantastic curly, swirly tail too. Well, I have it so that I can grab on and hang on to things down in the sea. Remember I said I had no arms? Well, I use my tail to hold on to ocean grass or coral. Then I can just hang out for a while and not have to swim around all day long! It's pretty cool... especially when I just want to take a rest.



Did you know that there are over 35 different kinds of seahorses? And we mainly live close to shore. That's why I have to watch out for those nasty crabs. But some of us like to venture out into coral reefs and estuaries (ES-CHEW-AIR-

EES - that's a fancy word for a body of water where rivers and streams meet), but even still we like to stay close to shore. People who go snorkeling love to look for seahorses! But even though we are hard to spot, you may find us if you're lucky!



But do you want to know the most interesting, phenomenal, magnificent thing about seahorses? It's something that makes us different from every other animal in the WHOLE WIDE WORLD. Do you know how you were born? Did your mommy carry you in her belly? Probably! Most every mommy at one point or another has a baby in her belly! But guess where I came from? Guess who was sent to the animal hospital when it was time for me to be born. Well, it wasn't my mommy. Yep, you guessed it! IT WAS MY DAD!!! Can you believe it? Did you know that seahorses are the only species in the whole wide world where daddies carry babies in the bellies rather than mommies? Yes, and guess how many babies? No, not 80 gazillion, because that would be a lot! But my dad had about 300 other little babies in his belly with me! And it wasn't actually a belly, it was more like a pocket or a pouch that's near his belly... umm, sort of like kangaroos. Anyway, some daddies carry more babies in their special pouch and some carry less. One seahorse dad can have anywhere between 50 and a thousand babies at once! Incredible.



Well, I hope you liked learning about seahorses. They're fascinating creatures if I don't say so myself!

The End



Teacher Notes



Introduction

Identify the major oceans on earth – talk about how each ocean contains smaller areas of water called seas, bays, or gulfs which are partly enclosed by land.

Point out the different oceans on the map. Have students label on their own (art connection) and share them with a partner (think-pair-share).



Lesson Objectives:

Students Will...

- Develop an awareness of oceans through activities featuring marine life (undersea and seashore). Students will recognize and identify saltwater fish from the ocean nearest to us and locate that on a map.
- Use vocabulary related to the sea horse.
- Learn about the sea horse's life cycle.
- Write an information card about the life cycle of a sea horse (optional depending on the lesson)



Lesson Introduction:

The discussion will begin by showing the class the globe then asking, "Where are the oceans of the world? How do we know which are the oceans on the globe?" Depending on how near/far your school is located from a coast, ask if anyone has ever been to the ocean. Then display a KWL chart and ask students what they know about the ocean.

K= What do you know W = what do you want to know L = what do you want to learn

You can do another KWL with the whole group about seahorses to make your lesson more specific and in-depth and relative to the story.

Finally students will watch a video on ocean life to better familiarize them with ocean life-Check safari- montage or other school / online resources for Bill Nye videos or other "sea life" videos.

Then show a map of the oceans waters/ areas where sea horses live. Emphasize that sea horses do not live all over! And that they mostly live in tropical waters. Talk about climate and what distinguishes tropical climates from others.

Key Questions: (which may vary depending on grade level)

What is an ocean?

What do you know about the ocean?

What is the largest sea creature? Smallest?

People are mammals, can mammals live in the ocean?

What would you like to know about the ocean?

Culminating Discussion Questions:

Talk about the difference between life on earth - terrestrial life and sea life?

Creative writing/ discussion topics: What would you do if you were a seahorse?

What would your life be like underwater if you were a seahorse?

Would you want to be a seahorse - why or why not?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Have students visit [Animal Super-Dads](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/seahorse/superdads.html)

(<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/seahorse/superdads.html>) to learn about seven other "animal dads" that take an active role in caring for their young. Encourage students to choose one of these "animal dads" and compare and contrast it with the seahorse.

The Story Connection and Science Teaching Standards -

NS.K-4.1 SCIENCE AS INQUIRY

As a result of activities in grades K-4, all students should develop

- Abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry
- Understanding about scientific inquiry

NS.K-4.3 LIFE SCIENCE

As a result of activities in grades K-4, all students should develop understanding of

- The characteristics of organisms
- Life cycles of organisms
- Organisms and environments